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DUALISM IN THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF TESTIMONY AND THE ABILITY INTUITION

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i) Introduction

In her book, *Learning From Words* (2008), Jennifer Lackey extensively argues for what she calls a *dualist* account of testimonial knowledge. That is to say, testimonial justification or warrant is neither reducible to, nor completely independent of basic sources of knowledge such as sense perception, memory and inductive inference. Instead, Lackey prompts us to move beyond the heated debate between reductionism and non-reductionism and towards her dualist account, which, she claims, can accommodate both of these views.

Lackey, however, does not classify her account into any of the broader trends of contemporary epistemology, despite the fact that she (2007) has argued against virtue reliabilism through a counterexample of ... testimonial knowledge, viz. the Morris case (2007, 352).¹ Conversely, the aim of the present paper is to investigate whether Lackey's astute analysis *is* in line with the *ability intuition* –i.e. the idea that knowledge must be the product of cognitive abilities— as it is captured by a virtue reliabilistic necessary condition on knowledge that has been recently put forward by Pritchard, namely COGA_{weak} (2010c).

For this reason, I will first outline Lackey's view and I will then consider the motivating ideas and most closely related aspects of COGA_{weak}. Finally, having both views in mind, I will attempt a comparative analysis of them that will hopefully expose some interesting similarities, which, in virtue of coherence, could render both accounts mutually supportive and informative.

¹ I will here discuss the 'Morris case', as modified by Pritchard (2009, 68) (i.e. the 'Jenny case' as Pritchard describes it). Notice, though, that apart from the hero's name, nothing else really changes.

ii) Dualism in the Epistemology of Testimony

Early on in her book (2008, ch1 and ch2), contemplating on the process of testimonial exchange, Lackey rejects the “belief view of testimony” (BVT) according to which we learn from the speakers’ beliefs, not their statements. On the contrary, on Lackey’s view, although beliefs are usually involved in a testimonial exchange, we do not gain knowledge on their basis but, instead, on the basis of the speakers’ statements:

The “process of communication via testimony does not involve a speaker transmitting her belief to a hearer along with the epistemic properties it possesses. [...] Instead, a speaker offers a statement to a hearer, along with the epistemic properties *it possesses*, and a hearer forms the corresponding belief on the basis of understanding and accepting the statement in question” (Lackey 2008, 72).

Although this is a very interesting claim with several ramifications such as that testimony can function as a generative epistemic source, its exposition is far beyond the scope of the present essay. Instead, granting the above points to Lackey, we shall move on to her analysis of the origins of testimonial justification/warrant.

Lackey first considers reductionism according to which the epistemic status of testimony is ultimately reducible to sense perception, memory, and inductive inference. As Hume (1977, 75)—who is often regarded (quite possibly unjustly) as the best-known supporter of reductionism regarding the epistemology of testimony—notes, “the reason why we place any credit in witnesses and historians, is not derived from any *connexion*, which we perceive *a priori*, between testimony and reality, but because we are accustomed to find a conformity between them.”²

More precisely, reductionists ascribe to the ‘*positive reasons*’ thesis, according to which justification or warrant is attached to testimonial beliefs only by the presence of appropriate positive reasons on the part of the hearers, thereby assigning *all* of the epistemic burden on the hearers’ shoulders. Since these reasons cannot be testimonial (otherwise there would be circularity) they must depend on other epistemic sources that typically include sense perception, memory and inductive inference. Therefore, testimonial justification and warrant is ultimately reducible to the justification/warrant

² In a similar vein, Faulkner (2000, 587-8) claims that “it is doxastically irresponsible to accept testimony without some background belief in the testimony’s credibility or truth”, and “an audience is justified in forming a testimonial belief if and only if he is justified in accepting the speaker’s testimony.” Or, consider Fricker (1994, 149-50): “the hearer should be discriminating in her attitude to the speaker, in that she should be continually evaluating him for trustworthiness throughout their exchange, in the light of the evidence, or cues, available to her.”

of these basic epistemic sources. Having these considerations in mind, Lackey formulates reductionism thusly:

Lackey's Reductionism

For every speaker, A, and hearer, B, B believes that p with justification/warrant on the basis of A's testimony if and only if:

(R1) B believes that p on the basis of A's testimony;

(R2) B has sufficiently good non-testimonial positive reasons to accept A's testimony. (Lackey 2008, 145)

However, Lackey claims that the possession of appropriately positive reasons does not necessarily guarantee to the hearer the reliability of the speaker's testimony.³ Consider, for example, Max who has known Ethel for the last ten years, over the course of which, he has acquired excellent positive grounds for thinking that Ethel is a reliable source of testimony. Currently, however, Ethel is going through a personal crisis that no one knows about, and, so, in a state of distress, reports to Max that her purse has been stolen, even though she has no reason to think that this is the case. Ironically enough, however, and unbeknownst to Ethel, it turns out that her purse was in fact stolen when she was at the coffee shop, earlier that same day.

What this Gettier-case demonstrates, Lackey (2008, 152) explains, is that despite the fact that the hearer has excellent positive reasons for accepting the speaker's testimony, the speaker acts "completely out of epistemic character", delivering an unreliable report, which though it turns out to be true, prevents the hearer from acquiring knowledge. Therefore, as mentioned before, the possession of appropriately positive reasons does not necessarily guarantee to the hearer the reliability of the speaker's testimony and, so, Lackey concludes, reductionism is not an adequate account of testimonial knowledge.

Consequently, Lackey moves on to examine the adequacy of non-reductionism according to which testimony is just as epistemically basic as sense perception, memory, and inductive inference. Such a view can be traced back to the work of Reid (1983, 281-2) according to which "the wise author of nature hath planted in the human mind a propensity to rely upon human testimony before we can get a reason for doing so." So, on the non-reductionist view, acquiring testimonial knowledge does not require the possession of any positive reasons on the part of the hearer; instead, as Tyler Burge (1993, 467) explains, "a person is entitled to accept as

³ Lackey supports her claim through the consideration of two examples, namely 'Nested Speaker' and 'Unnested Speaker' (Lackey 2008, 148; 152).

true something that is presented as true and is intelligible to him, unless there are stronger reasons not to do so". Or, consider Matthew Weiner (2003, 257) who, in a similar vein, holds that "we are justified in accepting anything that we are told unless there is positive evidence against doing so."⁴ Crucially, notice the commonplace in all the aforementioned views; while the absence of any negative reasons *is* necessary for the acquisition of testimonially based knowledge, the presence of positive reasons is not. Put another way, non-reductionists hold that so long as there are no relevant undefeated defeaters,⁵ hearers can acquire testimonially based knowledge merely on the basis of a speaker's testimony, thereby seemingly shifting the entire epistemic burden from the hearer to the speaker.⁶

Accordingly, Lackey formulates her version of non-reductionism thusly:

Lackey's Non-Reductionism

For every speaker, A, and hearer, B, B knows that *p* on the basis of A's testimony if and only if:

- (NR1) B believes that *p* on the basis of the content of A's testimony;
- (NR2) B has no undefeated (psychological or normative) defeaters for A's testimony;
- (NR3) It is true that *p*. (Lackey 2008, 158)

However, Lackey goes on to test non-reductionism against the 'Incompetent Agent' (158) where an unreliable speaker testifies to a hearer. But, the hearer possesses no relevant undefeated defeaters and so, according to non-reductionism, must ultimately accept the proffered defective statement as true. Therefore, Lackey argues, just as in the case of merely possessing positive reasons, the mere absence of negative ones does not guarantee to the hearer the reliability of the speaker's testimony and, so, non-reductionism is in need of the further condition:

- (NR4) The speaker's testimony is reliable or otherwise truth-conducive.

⁴ In a similar spirit, Audi (1998, 142) claims that "gaining testimonially grounded knowledge normally requires only having no reason for doubt about the credibility of the attester."

⁵ It is here important to introduce the two relevant types of defeaters that could affect one's acquisition of testimonial knowledge. First, there are psychological defeaters, which are beliefs or doubts that are had by the hearer and which indicate that the hearer's beliefs are either false or unreliably formed. Notice that psychological defeaters are not necessarily true. Second, there are normative defeaters, which are doubts or beliefs that the hearer ought to have, and which indicate that the hearer's beliefs are either false or unreliably formed. In other words, normative defeaters are beliefs or doubts that the hearer should have (despite whether or not the hearer does actually have them), given the presence of certain available evidence.

⁶ I here say 'seemingly' because, as it will become apparent later on, to possess no undefeated defeaters against a testimonial report is actually a condition that requires a fairly active epistemic stance on the part of the hearer.

(Lackey 2008, 159)

Next, however, Lackey considers two counterexamples in which the receiver of testimony is either insensitive to the relevant undefeated defeaters—even though they are evidentially present to him—or oversensitive to them, thereby being, in both cases, unjustified/unwarranted in accepting the speaker’s testimony.⁷ Accordingly, Lackey suggests, we must ensure that the hearer in question has the capacity for and is appropriately sensitive to the relevant defeaters. Hence, non-reductionism must be supplemented by the further condition:

(NR5) The hearer is a reliable or properly functioning recipient of testimony. (Lackey 2008, 164)

Then again, Lackey thinks that all of the five conditions that have been so far proposed are inadequate. The reason is that the counterexample of the “Insular Community” (Lackey 2008, 164-5)—in which the hero happens to ask for directions the only reliable testifier in a city whose members always deceive the ‘outsiders’—demonstrates the need that the environment wherein testimony is exchanged must be suitable for the reception of reliable testimony. Consequently, non-reductionism must be strengthened with one last condition:

(NR6) The environment in which B receives A’s testimony is suitable for the reception of reliable testimony. (Lackey 2008, 167)

Finally, having formed non-reductionism along the lines of the above six conditions, Lackey goes on to test it against Sam, the hero of one last counterexample, namely ‘Alien’ (Lackey 2008, 168-9); Walking in the forest, Sam sees someone who looks like an alien dropping a book. Sam recovers the book and notices that it is written in what appears to be English and it looks like to what we on Earth would call a diary. By reading the first sentence of the book, Sam forms the corresponding belief that tigers have eaten some of the inhabitants of the author’s planet. In reality, the book is a diary written in English and it is true and reliably written in it that tigers have eaten the aliens. Sam is also a properly functioning recipient of testimony and he is situated in an environment that is suitable for the reception of reliable reports.

Now, despite the fact that all the above six conditions are satisfied, it seems implausible to accept that Sam gains knowledge in this case. The reason, Lackey

⁷ Lackey refers to these two examples as ‘Good-Natured’ and ‘Compulsively Paranoid’. See (Lackey 2008 160; 161).

explains, is that Sam holds no positive reasons on behalf of the speaker's testimony; he knows nothing about aliens, he has no beliefs about their reliability as testifiers, he has no idea about the purpose of alien 'diaries', he has no common-sense alien-psychological theory, he has no beliefs about the reliability of the author of this book and so on. In the absence of such positive reasons, Lackey suggests, the only rational choice for Sam is to withhold belief.

Overall, what the Alien counterexample purports to demonstrate is that in the absence of any positive reasons for the reliability of the speaker's testimony, it is *not rational* for the hearer to accept the target testimony. Therefore, while reductionism as expressed through the positive reasons thesis is not a sufficient account of testimonial knowledge, it nevertheless seems to capture a necessary aspect of it. Therefore, Lackey proposes, we are in need of a dual account of testimonial knowledge that will involve both reductionist and non-reductionist conditions and which she formulates as follows:

Lackey's Dualism

For every speaker, A, and hearer, B, B knows (believes with justification/warrant) that *p* on the basis of A's testimony only if:

- (D1) B believes that *p* on the basis of the content of A's testimony;
 - (D2) A's testimony is reliable or otherwise truth conducive;
 - (D3) B is a reliable or properly working recipient of testimony;
 - (D4) The environment in which B receives A's testimony is suitable for the reception of reliable testimony;
 - (D5) B has no undefeated (psychological or normative) defeaters for A's testimony;
 - (D6) B has appropriate positive reasons for accepting A's testimony.
- (Lackey 2008, 177-8)

To properly appreciate the motivating idea of Lackey's dualist account, remember that reductionism puts all of the epistemic responsibility on the hearer while non-reductionism assigns the entire epistemic work to the speaker. On the contrary, the main idea that motivates Lackey's dualist account is the realization that the epistemic burden must be distributed across both the speaker and the hearer. As Lackey vividly puts it, "it takes two to tango", because "an adequate view of testimonial justification or warrant needs to recognize that the justification or warrant of a hearer's belief has *dual* sources, being grounded in both the reliability of the speaker and the rationality of the hearer's reasons for belief" (Lackey 2008, 177).

In addition, there are two interrelated clarifications that are in order here. First, notice that since the epistemic burden of testimonial justification/warrant is

distributed across both the speaker and the hearer, the demand for the acquisition of positive reasons on the part of the hearer is not as strong as reductionists would require it to be. That is to say, the ‘positive reasons’ condition (D6) is not meant as a sufficient condition for acquiring testimonial knowledge. Rather, positive reasons are only required in order to render the hearer’s acceptance of the speaker’s testimony “rational, or at least, not irrational” (Lackey 2008, 180).

And second, notice that even though it has been argued that having positive reasons for accepting one’s testimony requires from the hearer to have all kinds of knowledge about people, their areas of expertise and their psychological propensities, which knowledge most subjects lack, this is not an actual problem for dualism. Granted, to accept one’s testimony as true on merely positive reasons requires a great deal of relevant knowledge, which is implausible to assume that normal subjects have. But, requiring positive reasons that can make my acceptance of one’s testimony rational, or at least not irrational is a far less demanding requisite that can be satisfied in much simpler ways. In particular, Lackey provides three types of inductively based positive reasons that could allow normal subjects to identify reliable (or unreliable) testimony.⁸

The first type includes criteria for individuating epistemically reliable contexts and contextual features:

“Specifically, even if B has not observed a general conformity of reports delivered in contexts of kind C and the truth, B may have observed the general conformity of reports delivered in contexts of kind C and the truth. So, if B believes that A’s report is delivered in a C-context, then this, combined with B’s inductive evidence regarding contexts of kind C, may give B an epistemically relevant positive reason for A’s testimony.” (Lackey 2008, 182)

For example, one may more easily accept the reports proffered in an astronomy lecture or found in *National Geographic* than the reports made in an astrology lecture or found in the *National Enquirer*. Or, in a similar vein, one may more easily accept the report of a calm and coherent witness testifying a robbery a few blocks away than would accept the report of a confused person who smells alcohol.⁹ “Similar remarks can be made about countless other contextual factors such as facial expressions, eye

⁸ Although the following types are originally meant for the provision of positive reasons for accepting one’s testimony, it is true that they can also be used equally well for the seemingly diametrically opposite process of coming up with undefeated defeaters for rejecting one’s testimony.

⁹ In relation to the previous footnote, see how this second case, as Lackey herself also suggests, is best explained in terms of either the possession or absence of undefeated defeaters, rather than the presence of positive reasons (2008, 181).

contact, mannerisms, narrative voice and so on” (Lackey 2008, 182).

The second class of reasons pertains to criteria that can help us make distinctions between reports:

“In particular, even if B has not observed a general conformity between A’s reports and the truth, B may have observed the general conformity of reports of kind R and the truth. Thus, if B believes that A’s report is an instance of kind R, this, combined with B’s inductive evidence regarding R-reports, may give B an epistemically relevant positive reason for A’s testimony.” (Lackey 2008, 182)

For instance, one may uncritically accept one’s testimony of the time of the day, one’s name, what one ate for breakfast, while one may adopt a more critical stance towards one reporting about political matters, the achievements of one’s children, one’s sexual performance, UFO sightings, and so on.

Finally, the third kind of criteria that Lackey puts forward are meant to help the hearer to distinguish between epistemically reliable and unreliable speakers:

“Specifically, even if B has not observed the general conformity between A’s reports and the truth, B may have observed the general conformity of speakers of kind S and the truth. Thus, if B believes that A is an S-speaker, then this combined with B’s inductive evidence regarding S-speakers, may give B an epistemically positive reason for A’s testimony.” (Lackey 2008, 183)

Consider, for example, that when one tries to find one's way to a desired destination in an unfamiliar city, one may accept in a less hesitant manner the testimony of someone who seems to be a local passer-by than would accept the word of someone who looks like a tourist.

The upshot of the above considerations is that despite the arguments that point to the opposite direction, there is indeed a plethora of ways in which a hearer can render her acceptance of a speaker’s testimony rational or, at least, not irrational, in the way that the ‘positive reasons’ condition of dualism demands.

In summary, and before moving to the consideration of virtue reliabilism and COGA_{weak}, since the process of acquiring information through testimony so as to form the corresponding beliefs is an interactive exchange between the hearer and the speaker, the relevant beliefs can only become justified/warranted by conditions that pertain to both parties of the said exchange. This realization has made Lackey go beyond the debate between reductionism and non-reductionism, thereby wedding these two views in a single dual account.

iii) The Ability Intuition, Virtue Reliabilism and COGA_{weak}

Having become familiar with Lackey's dualism in the epistemology of testimony, let us now see how contemporary epistemologists have endorsed the *ability intuition* on knowledge. For doing so, we should consider the motivating ideas of virtue reliabilism and the subsequent thoughts that have led to the formulation of a closely related necessary condition on knowledge, namely COGA_{weak}.

Virtue reliabilism is essentially a refinement of process reliabilism, where the latter is the view that knowledge is true belief that is the product of reliable belief-forming processes where a reliable process is one that tends to result in true rather than false beliefs. Process reliabilism is an externalist approach to knowledge; contrary to the traditional account of knowledge as internally justified true belief, one needs not know by *reflection alone* that one's beliefs are formed in a reliable fashion. So long as one employs a belief-forming process that has been deemed about as trustworthy on the basis of empirical investigation –or more broadly, in relation to one's previous engagements with the external world— one is justified in holding the resulting beliefs.

However, one of the main problems facing process reliabilism is that it is too weak in the sense that it allows any reliable process to count as knowledge-conducive. Consider for instance, Temp.

*Temp*¹⁰

Temp's job is to keep a record of the temperature in the room that he is in. He does this by consulting a thermometer on the wall. As it happens, this way of forming his beliefs about the temperature in the room will always result into a true belief. The reason for this, however, is not because the thermometer is working properly, since in fact it isn't—it is fluctuating randomly within a given range. Crucially, however, there is someone hidden in the room next to the thermostat who, unbeknownst to Temp, makes sure that every time Temp consults the thermometer the temperature in the room is adjusted so that it corresponds to the reading on the thermometer.

Obviously, the way in which Temp forms his beliefs is reliable. Accordingly, by the lights of process reliabilism, Temp can acquire knowledge in this way. As Pritchard explains, however, we cannot attribute knowledge to Temp because in cases of knowledge we want our beliefs to be responsive to the facts. On the contrary, in Temp's case, the direction of fit is exactly the opposite; it is not Temp's beliefs that

¹⁰ (Pritchard 2009, 48)

agree with facts, but the other way around. Therefore, it has been argued that process reliabilism must be somehow strengthened so that it will ensure that one's beliefs are formulated in a way that will guarantee their responsiveness to the facts. But how can one satisfy this demand? The analysis of what goes on in Temp's case should be illuminating.

Although Temp's beliefs ultimately turn out to be true, this is obviously not due to Temp's cognitive agency. Temp does not employ any cognitive abilities and makes no efforts so as to ensure that his beliefs will correspond to the facts. Instead, on the basis of a randomly fluctuating thermometer, he uncritically and passively acquires false beliefs, which, fractions of time later, turn out to be true due to the hidden helper's intervention. Therefore, what explains why Temp ultimately gets things right is an environmental feature (i.e. the hidden helper), which is completely irrelevant to his cognitive agency; had the hidden helper been absent, Temp would no more enjoy true beliefs. On the contrary, had Temp employed his cognitive abilities in order to form his beliefs, the problem would have been resolved. Had Temp felt it is cold, he would not believe that it is hot no matter the reading of the broken thermometer. So long as Temp forms his beliefs on the basis of his cognitive abilities, he ensures that they will be responsive to the facts, such that they will come out true, *despite* the absence or the presence of the hidden helper's fortunate intervention.

So we see that in cases of knowledge we want one's true beliefs to be responsive to the facts, and the way to ensure this is by requiring that one's true beliefs are the product of one's cognitive abilities. Interestingly enough, and in close relation to the above considerations, Greco has claimed that "to say that someone knows is to say that his believing the truth can be credited to him. It is to say that the person got things right due to his own efforts and actions, rather than due to dumb luck, or blind chance, or something else." (2003, 111).

Noticeably, the general idea which all the above considerations are appealing to is that *knowledge must be the product of cognitive abilities* and is also known—amongst contemporary epistemologists—as the *ability intuition on knowledge*.¹¹ Remarkably, it is exactly this idea when combined with process reliabilism that gives rise to virtue reliabilism.

¹¹ The idea that knowledge must be grounded in cognitive abilities can be traced back to the writings of such figures as Sosa (1988; 1993) and Plantinga (1993). For more recent approaches to the idea see Greco (1999; 2003; 2006) and Pritchard (2009; 2010a; 2010b; 2010c).

In particular, Greco has proposed that not all belief-forming processes are knowledge-conducive; rather “it is those processes that have their bases in the stable and successful dispositions of the believer that are relevant for knowledge and justification.” (1999, 287) And he adds: “A belief *p* has a positive epistemic status for a person *S* just in case *S*’s believing *p* results from the stable and reliable dispositions that make up *S*’s cognitive character.” (1999, 287-8) On this view, one’s cognitive character consists of one’s cognitive faculties of the brain/CNS including, of course, one’s natural perceptual cognitive faculties, one’s memories and the overall doxastic system. In addition, it can also consist of acquired habits of thought, “acquired skills of perception and acquired methods of inquiry, including those involving highly specialized training or even advanced technology.” (Greco 1999, 19) Accordingly, virtue reliabilism is usually formulated as follows:

Virtue Reliabilism

S knows that *p* if and only if *S*’s reliable cognitive character is the most important necessary part of the total set of causal factors that give rise to *S*’s believing the truth regarding *p*.¹²

First, notice that virtue reliabilism can fare well with respect to the Temp case; it is not Temp’s cognitive character that is the most salient factor in the causal

¹² Greco calls his view ‘Agent Reliabilism’. I have here preferred this alternative name because as an anonymous reviewer has pointed out, Greco nowhere explicitly endorses such a strong formulation of the ability intuition on knowledge. Instead, Greco holds that *S* knows that *p* if and only if *S*’s reliable cognitive character is an important—but not necessarily the most important—necessary part of the total set of causal factors that give rise to *S*’s believing the *truth* regarding *p* (see Greco 1999, 287-8; 2004, 123; 2010, 12). His critics (Lackey 2007, Vaesen 2010) however, claim that in order for Greco to avoid the knowledge-undermining epistemic luck involved in Gettier problems (see Gettier 1963), he needs to endorse the strong formulation of the ability intuition as it has been cashed out above. The reason, they claim, is that in Gettier cases, one’s cognitive character remains an important necessary part in the causal explanation of how a person formed her true belief, even though she clearly lacks knowledge. For instance, in the case where a person justifiably believes that there is a sheep in the field because one sees a sheep-shaped rock and it also turns out that there is a real sheep behind the rock, one’s cognitive character is indeed an important factor in the causal explanation of why one came up with a true belief, because it is on the basis of one’s cognitive abilities that one actually formed the target belief which accidentally turned out to be true, as well. Accordingly, Greco’s critics object that in order to explain why this is not an instance of knowledge acquisition Greco must object that the person’s cognitive character is not the *most* salient feature in the explanation of how the person acquired her true belief; instead the most important factor is luck. And they go on to provide evidence that Greco does indeed endorse such a strong understanding of the ability intuition: “*S*’s cognitive character is not the *most salient* part [in such cases]” ((Greco 2003, 131, the emphasis is added) quoted in (Lackey 2007, 348) and (Vaesen 2010, 6)). This, however, may simply be a misunderstanding because Greco seems to avoid this problem by elsewhere claiming that in Gettier cases one does not believe *the truth* because of one’s cognitive abilities: “In Gettier cases, *S* believes from an ability and *S* has a true belief, but the fact that *S* believes from an ability does not explain why *S* has a true belief” (Greco 2010). In Gettier cases, luck simply cancels out the salience of *S*’s cognitive character at *arriving at truth*, and so *S*’s cognitive character is not an important feature in the causal explanation of how one gets to the truth of the matter. Therefore, contrary to what his critics think, it seems that Greco does not need to endorse the strong version of the ability intuition on knowledge in order to avoid Gettier counterexamples.

explanation of how he believes the truth. Instead, it is the hidden helper's intervention. Therefore, according to virtue reliabilism and our intuitions, knowledge cannot be gained in this way.

However, and in close relation to our discussion on testimony, Lackey (2007) has argued that virtue reliabilism is too strong to account for cases of testimonial knowledge. To see why, consider the following case:

*Jenny*¹³

Jenny gets off the train in an unfamiliar city and asks the first person that she meets for directions. The person that she asks is indeed knowledgeable about the area, and gives her directions. Jenny believes what she is told and goes on her way to her intended destination.

Now, unless we want to deny a great amount of knowledge that we suppose we have, we must admit that Jenny gains knowledge in this way. However, Lackey (2007) has argued that given the way Jenny gains knowledge, her cognitive character has not much to do with the true-status of her belief. Instead, it is the informant's cognitive character that is the most salient factor in the causal explanation of why Jenny believes the truth. So, according to virtue reliabilism, Jenny lacks knowledge that she in fact possesses.

As mentioned before, the upshot of the above considerations is that the Jenny counterexample shows virtue reliabilism to be too strong and that it must be somehow weakened. In fact, in an attempt to capture the spirit of the *ability intuition* on knowledge, Pritchard (2010c) has recently proposed along virtue reliabilistic lines a necessary condition on knowledge, viz. COGA_{weak}, which can accommodate the Jenny case as well. Before quoting COGA_{weak}, however, we should first take a look at what considerations might have led to it by investigating the Jenny case in some more detail.

First, as Pritchard explains, it is important to note that to say that Jenny gains knowledge in this way, we must read the example in such a way that Jenny is in an epistemically friendly environment—i.e., the city that Jenny visits had better not be renowned for its dishonest informants. Was that the case, we would not credit Jenny with knowledge. Second, notice that we presuppose some inclinations about Jenny's cognitive character. We expect that Jenny can distinguish between potentially reliable and clearly unreliable informants; we do not expect that Jenny would be happy to ask

¹³ (Pritchard 2009, 68). It is adapted from Lackey's 'Morris case' (see Lackey 2007, 352)

just anybody. For example, we anticipate that she would not ask someone who clearly looked like a tourist (i.e. an unreliable informant). “Had the first person she met been obviously mad, or a stereotypical tourist, for example, then we would expect her to move on to the next prospective informant down the street” (Pritchard 2010a, 18). Moreover, we expect that she is able to distinguish between potentially reliable and clearly unreliable information and thereby that she would not believe whatever she was told, had it been obviously false (for instance to go past the city hall whereas, in fact, she is in a village). “Furthermore, if the manner in which the informant passed on the directions was clearly questionable—if the informant was vague, shift, hostile, and evasive, say—then we would expect our hero to exercise due caution” (Pritchard 2010a, 18). Had Jenny not been responsive to these epistemologically relevant factors, we would not have normally attributed her with knowledge. We, therefore, see that it is not that Jenny’s cognitive character has nothing to do with her believing the truth; it is just that the informant’s role is more important. It is upon these considerations that Pritchard proposes $COGA_{weak}$.¹⁴

COGA_{weak}

If *S* knows that *p*, then *S*’s true belief that *p* is the product of a reliable belief-forming process, which is appropriately integrated within *S*’s cognitive character such that her cognitive success is to a significant degree creditable to her cognitive agency. (Pritchard 2010c, 5)

Obviously, $COGA_{weak}$ can easily handle the Jenny case; although the cognitive success is not *primarily* creditable to Jenny—but to the stranger—Jenny, in so being responsive to the epistemically relevant factors, has the right sort of abilities and employs them in the right sort of way so as to appropriately integrate the stranger’s information within her cognitive character, in such a way that the cognitive success for believing the truth is *significantly* creditable to her cognitive agency.¹⁵ Therefore, according to $COGA_{weak}$, Jenny can gain knowledge in this way.

¹⁴ It should be here clarified that although the ‘Jenny case’ (initially put forward by Lackey as the ‘Morris case’ (2007, 352)) was one of the main reasons for revising the strong version of virtue reliabilism (and consequently coming up with $COGA_{weak}$), Lackey’s dualism in testimonial knowledge and Pritchard’s $COGA_{weak}$ have been separately elaborated. Obviously, Lackey’s account is only meant to account for testimonial knowledge, while $COGA_{weak}$ is meant to apply to any kind of knowledge. There is, then, no suspicion that $COGA_{weak}$ is *ad hoc* and it should be thought of as a quite encouraging point if it, indeed, turned out to be in accordance with Lackey’s detailed account of testimonial knowledge.

¹⁵ Notice that the appropriate integration of information acquired by external sources within one’s cognitive character is itself a belief-forming process, which is reducible to more basic inductively and memory based belief-forming processes. Nevertheless, the said kind of belief-forming process seems to be critical even though it is usually a transparent one.

Finally, before moving on to the next section, notice that what virtue reliabilism and COGA_{weak} have in common is their attempt to analyze knowledge, or at least a necessary aspect of it—COGA_{weak} is not a sufficient condition on knowledge—in terms of credit attributions. This is so because in trying to accommodate the ability intuition on knowledge, both views share another common idea: credit is usually attributable in cases of success through ability.¹⁶ However, notice the lenient demands of COGA_{weak} regarding the creditability of the cognitive success to one's self. In contrast to the strong version of virtue reliabilism where believing the truth must be primarily creditable to one's cognitive character and thereby to one's self, COGA_{weak} loosens the required dependence of the cognitive success on one's cognitive agency, thereby allowing credit to be attributable to other factors as well.¹⁷ Therefore, according to COGA_{weak}, even though the most salient factor that explains Jenny's cognitive success is the informant's contribution, Jenny's cognitive abilities render her cognitive agency significantly creditworthy, thereby allowing her to gain knowledge in this way.

iv) Dualism in the Epistemology of Testimony and COGA_{weak}

To refresh our memory, every instance of testimony is an exchange between two parties. Accordingly, on Lackey's view, the testimonial justification/warrant of the hearer's true belief does not originate in its entirety from the part of either the hearer or the speaker. Instead, both the speaker and the hearer shoulder the epistemic burden: "a hearer's belief has dual sources, being grounded in both the reliability of the speaker and the rationality of the hearer's reasons for belief." (Lackey 2008, 177)

¹⁶ A subtle difference between the two proposals, however, is that while Greco presents knowledge as true belief which is 'of credit', Pritchard insists on thinking about knowledge merely as 'creditable' true belief. These two notions are not the same. "For example, one's cognitive success could be creditable to one's cognitive agency without being at all of credit to one (perhaps the cognitive success is the result of an inquiry that one ought not to be pursuing, because, say, there are epistemically more desirable inquiries that one should be focusing instead" (Pritchard 2010a, en. 26). While this distinction is not important to the present discussion, it is of great significance with respect to the debate on the value of knowledge. If, as Greco claims, knowledge is true belief, which is 'of credit', this is because knowledge is an achievement. Since achievements are finally valuable, knowledge turns out to be finally valuable, as well. However, considering cases such as the one mentioned above, or mundane instances of knowledge such as perceptual beliefs, Pritchard claims that knowledge is not always an achievement and so not finally valuable either. For further discussion on this issue, see (Pritchard 2010b, §2.4).

¹⁷ In relation to footnote 12, however, notice that Greco's 'Agent Reliabilism' appears to be closer to COGA_{weak} than to the strong version of virtue reliabilism with which COGA_{weak} is here juxtaposed.

Let us now proceed to a comparative analysis between Lackey's dualism on the epistemology of testimony and COGA_{weak}, in order to draw some interesting parallels that, in virtue of coherence, may render these two views mutually supportive and informative. For this reason I will first consider condition D4, then I will move on to D6 and D5, D3 and I will finish with D2.

To begin with, consider condition D4 according to which *the environment in which B receives A's testimony must be suitable for the reception of reliable testimony*. The reason for which I take up this point first is that there is no straight reference to it in the formulation of COGA_{weak}. Nevertheless, notice that Pritchard's investigation of what goes wrong in the Jenny case (presented in the previous section) upon which he later forms COGA_{weak}, begins with the point that it is important to note that to say that Jenny gains knowledge in that way, we must read the example in such a way that Jenny is in an epistemically friendly environment; it is not as if the city that Jenny visits is renowned for its dishonest informants. Was that the case then we would not attribute knowledge to Jenny. So we see that the problem posited by the knowledge undermining luck that attaches to a true belief when formed in an inappropriate environment goes far beyond unnoticed in the process of formulating COGA_{weak}.¹⁸ And since COGA_{weak} is only a necessary condition on knowledge—and should this become a pressing point—there is nothing preventing us from adding to it a supplementary clause that could rule out the lucky acquisition of true beliefs due to the environmental inappropriateness.¹⁹

Let us now turn to conditions D5 and D6 according to which *the hearer must have no undefeated defeaters against the speaker's testimony* and *the hearer must have appropriate positive reasons for the speaker's testimony*, respectively. The incentive for discussing these two conditions together is that they are jointly meant to

¹⁸ In fact, Pritchard recognizes the problem posited by the knowledge undermining luck to be a central one. Accordingly, he elsewhere formulates a complete account of knowledge by combining COGA_{weak} with an anti-luck condition on knowledge, namely the safety principle. Consider for example *Anti-Luck Virtue Epistemology*: *S knows that p if and only if S's safe belief that p is the product of her relevant cognitive abilities (such that her safe cognitive success is to a significant degree creditable to her cognitive agency)* (Pritchard, manuscript, 20). And again, in (Pritchard 2010a, 76) we can read: "knowledge is safe belief that arises out of the reliable cognitive traits that make up one's cognitive character, such that one's cognitive success is to a significant degree creditable to one's cognitive character".

¹⁹ In relation to the previous footnote, however, Lackey (2008, ch. 5, fn. 30) suggests that one could rule out the lucky acquisition of true belief in inappropriate environments in alternative ways such as with the inclusion of a metareliability condition. Although there might be some other alternatives as well (for instance Greco's (2008) 'subject-sensitive, interest-dependent contextualism') their exposition is far beyond the scope of the present paper.

ensure the rational or, at least, not irrational, acceptance of the speaker's testimony. Moreover, notice that the absence of any undefeated defeaters against and the possession of positive reasons for a testimonial report could be thought of as the two sides of the same coin. To see why, notice that both conditions require that one is aware of, able and supposed to detect any such reasons—should they become evidentially available—the only difference being that in order to acquire testimonial knowledge, in the end, no undefeated defeaters must remain while positive reasons must have been acquired. Importantly, however, both conditions require an active stance on the part of the hearer in the sense that she must be in a continuous lookout for satisfying them. I shall return to this point later on in the discussion of condition D3.

Meanwhile, we can return to COGA_{weak} to see how conditions D5 and D6 can be seen through the lens of this account. First, notice that Pritchard clearly acknowledges that to say that Jenny gains knowledge in this way, we presuppose some natural inclinations about her cognitive character. We expect that Jenny can distinguish between potentially reliable and clearly unreliable informants; we do not expect that Jenny would be happy to ask just anybody. For example we anticipate that she would not ask someone who clearly looked like a tourist (i.e. an unreliable informant), or that she would not trust an informant that is vague, hostile or evasive. Moreover, we expect that she is able to distinguish between potentially reliable and clearly unreliable information and that she would therefore not believe whatever she was told, had it been obviously false. Had Jenny not been responsive to such epistemologically relevant factors then we would not have normally attributed her with knowledge. Interestingly, though, notice that Jenny's responsiveness to these epistemologically relevant factors can also be described in terms of the three types of inductively based positive and negative reasons that Lackey grants to epistemic agents for identifying reliable (or unreliable) instances of testimony; namely, (i) criteria for individuating epistemically reliable contexts and contextual features, (ii) criteria for distinguishing between reliable and unreliable reports and (iii) criteria for identifying epistemically reliable speakers.²⁰

²⁰ Notice that, as Lackey herself admits, this list is not meant to be exhaustive as there could be further inductively based ways to distinguish between the reliability and unreliability of testimonial reports (2008, 181). Nevertheless, the identification of reliable reports should not be thought of as being exclusively based on inductive reasons, as it may often be the outcome of reasons that have to do with the agent's memory; consider, for example, an agent assessing the coherence of information provided

Therefore, we see that Jenny, in so being responsive to such epistemologically relevant factors, has the right sort of inductively based belief-forming processes and employs them in the right sort of way so as to appropriately integrate the information conveyed by the communicable content of the speaker's act of communication within the rest of her cognitive character. What is of further import, however, is to notice that since one's cognitive character has been described as consisting of one's perceptual cognitive faculties, acquired habits of thought, but also of one's memories and the entire doxastic system, we can see that to say that Jenny, in so being responsive to the epistemologically relevant factors, appropriately integrates the speaker's information within her cognitive character is on a par with saying that Jenny renders rational or, at least, not irrational the acceptance of the speaker's testimony. Because to rationally accept a piece of information is to say that this information does not conflict with the rest of one's beliefs, or that the process of acquiring it does not conflict with the rest of one's doxastic attitudes. And this, one could argue, is exactly what Lackey intended for conditions D5 and D6 to do.

Let us now move on to the last condition that pertains to the hearer. D3 demands that *the hearer is a reliable or properly functioning recipient of testimony*. As we have seen, the reason for which Lackey includes this condition is to rule out cases in which the recipient of testimony either has positive or negative reasons evidentially available to him but fails to properly appreciate them, or is oversensitive to them, thereby being viciously justified in accepting the speaker's testimony. What must be further noticed, though, is that Lackey makes condition D3 subtler by adding the qualification that the hearer must be a reliable or properly functioning recipient of testimony in a substantial way. In particular, in her defense of her dualist view against the Infant/Child Objection, Lackey argues (2008, ch.7) that the only meaningful way for the 'no undefeated defeaters' condition (D5) to be satisfied is substantively, as opposed to trivially. To better understand this point, she prompts us to consider the following: "if we impose a no- ϕ ing condition on X then there is a crucial difference between what we might call *trivial satisfaction* and *substantive satisfaction* of such condition, a difference that depends on X's capacity to ϕ . In particular, let us put forth the following:

Trivial Satisfaction: If X does not ϕ merely because X does not have the capacity to

by a proffered report with the rest of his/her doxastic system.

ϕ , then X has trivially satisfied the no- ϕ ing condition.

Substantial Satisfaction: If X has the capacity to ϕ and does not ϕ , then X has substantively satisfied the no- ϕ ing condition.” (Lackey 2008, 198)²¹

Having this crucial distinction in mind, Lackey goes on to explain that if ϕ is an epistemological or moral condition, then only in the second case is X epistemologically or morally praiseworthy for satisfying it (Lackey 2008, 198). Therefore, conditions D5 and D6 should be understood only as requiring a substantial satisfaction of themselves. And while it may be true that there is no obvious sense in which the ‘positive reasons’ thesis (D6) could be satisfied in a non-substantial way, this qualification is crucial for the ‘no undefeated defeaters’ condition, the point being that if the hearer does not have any undefeated defeaters because she is incapable of having any at all, then she is not *praiseworthy* (justified/ warranted) for accepting an otherwise reliable testimony and, therefore, she lacks knowledge.

Now, to see how this is connected to Pritchard’s account, recall that COGA_{weak} reads that for *S* to know that *p*, *S*’s true belief must be the product of some reliable belief-forming process that is appropriately integrated within *S*’s cognitive character, such that the cognitive success is significantly creditable to *S*’s cognitive agency. However, since credit is attributed in cases of success through ability, this means that the employment and exercise of the belief-forming processes,²² via which *S* came to accept the speaker’s testimony, must signify that *S* has exhibited some *effort* for which his/her cognitive agency is *praiseworthy*, and so, believing the truth can be significantly credited to him. And this, in turn, is on a par with Lackey’s demand that the acquisition of positive reasons and the failure to detect any negative ones are conditions on testimonial knowledge that must be *substantively* satisfied.

Approaching to the end, let us turn to Lackey’s only condition that pertains to the speaker, namely D2: *the speaker’s testimony must be reliable or otherwise truth-conducive*. First, we should concentrate on the epistemic burden distribution that the

²¹ One of the examples that motivate Lackey’s view is the following:

“For instance, one of the reasons it doesn’t make sense to impose a “no-lying condition” on a chair is because chairs cannot lie. To say that a chair has satisfied such a condition merely because it hasn’t lied, without taking into account whether the chair has the capacity to lie, trivializes what satisfaction of such a condition means. Of course, considerations of this sort apply to persons as well.” (Lackey 2008, 197)

²² Remember that, in cases of testimonial knowledge, the belief-forming processes found in the formulation of COGA_{weak} stand for the inductively and memory based positive and negative reasons that one may have for rationally, or at least not irrationally, accepting, or rejecting a speaker’s testimony (i.e. for appropriately integrating, or not, the speaker’s reports within the rest of one’s cognitive character).

inclusion of D2 entails. As it has been previously noted, Lackey's dualism, contrary to reductionism and non-reductionism that only focus either on the hearer or the speaker, distributes the epistemic burden across both parties of the testimonial exchange. But how can COGA_{weak} account for the dual origins of the epistemic justification/warrant? According to COGA_{weak}, knowledge can be attributed to *S* only if the cognitive success of believing the truth can be significantly credited to *S*'s cognitive agency. Crucially, however, COGA_{weak} denies that the cognitive success must be *wholly* attributed to the hearer's cognitive agency thereby allowing, in cases of testimonial knowledge, for the rest of the credit to be, at least in part, attributed to the speaker's epistemic effort. To see how this would work, it should be helpful to go back to the Jenny case; it is not that Jenny's cognitive character has nothing to do with her believing the truth; it is just that the informant's cognitive character is more important. Despite this fact, however, a significant part of the credit can be attributed to Jenny's cognitive agency for employing the right sort of belief-forming processes for rationally accepting the speaker's words. At the same time, however, the rest of the credit can be, at least in part, attributed to the speaker's cognitive agency for delivering a reliable report. So, we see that, in this way, COGA_{weak} can accommodate the very essence of Lackey's dualism in the epistemology of testimony, namely the epistemic burden distribution across both the speaker and the hearer.

v) Conclusion

By the lights of Lackey's dualism in the epistemology of testimony and COGA_{weak}, we can see that acquiring knowledge on the basis of information provided by testimonial reports is a belief-forming process that is neither reducible to nor entirely independent of more basic reliable belief-forming processes such as sense perception, memory and inductive inference. That is to say, while the rational acceptance of the information—not of the beliefs—conveyed by the content of the speaker's act of communication is reducible to the hearer's employment of further basic belief-forming processes, the reliability of the speaker's testimony is completely independent of them, entirely relying on the speaker's epistemic responsibility.

Therefore, just as COGA_{weak} allows, while the hearer's cognitive success of believing the truth is significantly, though not primarily, creditable to her cognitive agency for employing the relevant belief-forming processes in order to rationally

accept the speaker's report (i.e. to appropriately integrate it within her cognitive character), the rest of the credit should be attributed, at least in part, to the speaker's cognitive agency for delivering reliable information. But, to rationally accept the speaker's testimony through the satisfaction of conditions D5 and D6 is an effort that is not void of "all epistemic significance" (Lackey 2007). It is what renders the hearer *entitled* in accepting the speaker's report. Put another way, despite Lackey's initial estimations, it's *not* the case that what explains how a hearer acquires knowledge on the basis of testimony has nothing of epistemic interest to do with her and nearly everything of epistemic interest to do with the speaker (2007, 352). On the contrary, while it may not be the most salient feature, the hearer's role, just as COGA_{weak} anticipates, appears to be a significant one.

What is more, notice the difficulties facing any of the alternative views on knowledge to accommodate Lackey's dualist account of testimony. Any internalist condition on knowledge is going to be in trouble accounting for condition D2 (i.e. the speaker's testimony must be reliable or otherwise truth conducive). That is, it is not at all obvious how one may, by reflection alone, account for the externally originated justification resulting from the speaker's reliability.²³ Accordingly, Lackey's astute analysis of testimonial knowledge may only be accommodated by an externalist condition. However, a strong version of virtue reliabilism whereby the hearer's cognitive success must be *primarily* creditable to the hearer's cognitive agency is unable to do justice to the epistemic burden distribution across both the speaker and the hearer set forth by Lackey's dualist account. In contrast, COGA_{weak} has the means to explain the dual sources of justification in cases of testimonial knowledge by allowing the cognitive success to be *significantly* creditable to both parties of the said exchange.²⁴

And to conclude, while more may remain to be said on the epistemology of testimony, hopefully, it has been shown how Lackey's dualism and COGA_{weak} may complement each other by demonstrating an intriguing symmetry, which, one could argue, renders these two views mutually supportive and informative. In view of that, we may also reasonably conclude that Lackey's analysis of the epistemology of

²³ A similar point may as well be made with respect to conditions D5 and D6. Sometimes, the inductively based positive and negative reasons that Lackey grants to hearers for accepting or rejecting a speaker's report may be implicit and not reflectively accessible to the hearer—at least not at the moment of implementation.

²⁴ Arguably, Greco's 'Agent Reliabilism' may generate similar results (see also ft. 12 and 17).

testimony and the *ability intuition* on knowledge, once properly formulated in terms of credit attributions in a balanced way, appear to be in line.²⁵

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